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Travelers told to choose neutral nations' airlines

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Air travelers between points in the Middle East and the southern Mediterranean will be safer if they fly airlines of neutral countries, according to Mike Ackerman, co-owner of Ackerman and Palumbo, a Miami-based corporate security consultant.

Ackerman, a former CIA agent, has issued a list of international airlines that he rates as being most likely to be victims of terrorism.

Arab terrorists have pinpointed airlines belonging to nations viewed as being pro-West or pro-American or those in which fellow terrorists are jailed, he said.

The four with the highest risk are Kuwait Airways, EgyptAir, ALIA Royal Jordanian and Alitalia, the Italian national airline, Ackerman said.

El Al Israel, the Israeli airline, is a high-risk carrier but has superior

security protection, he said.

Airlines on which Mediterranean-bound passengers may expect substantial risks are U.S.-based airlines and British, French, Spanish and Austrian carriers, plus Gulf Air (Bahrain), Saudi Arabian Airlines, Iraqi Airways, Air India and Pakistan International Airlines.

All other European-based airlines offer a moderate risk, on the basis of Ackerman's ratings.

The carriers least likely to be terrorists' targets are Swissair, SAS (Scandinavian), TAP (Portugal), Qantas (Australia) and Singapore Airlines.

Ackerman stressed that his estimates are for travel between points in Southern Europe from Madrid to Athens and from those points to the Mideast. Destinations from North and South America to those points are not considered high-risk flights, he said.